

The American RECORD GUIDE

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edited by PETER HUGH REED
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Decca's FFRR Records

Editorial Notes

A post-war development in recording technique, which extends the highs to almost double what we have had on records to date, is the FFRR reproduction which comes out of England. Domestic Decca has lost no time in re-issuing in this country a group of these new FFRR (meaning "full frequency range recordings") discs. Heard on a machine that can produce the full range in these records, the reproduction is indeed an experience like opening the door into a concert hall. The infinite variety and shades of overtones give an aura to the music that cannot be fully described, for it is an experience that belongs to the ears.

Even on regular commercial equipment, these new discs have a fine semblance of realism although the overtones are not heard. Not many people will be able to hear these recordings as they should sound, since few machines extend to the full range that they embrace (they reproduce frequencies up to 14,000 c.p.s.). Our own experience with these recordings has been limited to date. Decca has been unable to send us review copies since the supply of the discs is limited. The domestic company has wisely seen fit to import the original records from England instead of repressing the selections here. The surfaces of the English Decca disc are smooth and very quiet, as any who have imported them know. Through the courtesy of Haynes-Griffin in New York City we were able to hear several of the most important issues in the first list of FFRR discs put out here. By all odds, the most important item in the list is the new, and the finest recording and performance to date of Stravinsky's *Petroushka*. This is reviewed elsewhere. A performance of Mendelssohn's *Italian Sym-*

phony by Dr. Heinz Unger and the National Symphony Orchestra has a transparency of tone on a high fidelity machine that is rewarding. Dr. Unger's performance is a well contrived one, but heard on a commercial outfit it does not supercede the old Koussevitzky one. Quite disappointing was the performance of Beethoven's *Leonora Overture No. 2* by the Concertgebouw Orchestra of Amsterdam, conducted by Edouard Van Beinum; the performance is heavy-handed. The Khachaturian *Piano Concerto*, on the other hand, is well worth investigating.

The contention, made by some reviewers, that the FFRR recording technique does away with monitoring is, of course, absurd. The brightness and brilliance of the overtones on a machine that can produce them gives the loud passages a semblance of realism which is all to the good, but those loud passages are not as full as in the concert hall. The quality of the soft passages is especially pleasing on a high fidelity machine.

One does not have to have a machine reproducing up to 14,000 c.p.s. to enjoy these recordings; I find they sound almost equally well on an outfit which cuts off anywhere between 8,500 c.p.s. and 10,000. On the Decola, the machine devised for the definitive performance of these recordings, the highs are frequently too brilliant and given to an unpleasant harshness. There is curious phenomena on these discs, when heard on a high fidelity machine: as each record side is completed and the needle runs into the eccentric grooves a low whistle is heard.

There is a point in regard to the reproduction of extended high frequencies on lateral-cut records which bears remembering. In our May 1942 issue we had an article on frequencies in recording in which it was brought out that the full frequency response in the record can only be reproduced by the pickup at the outer edges, as the needle travels into the inner grooves the frequency response is reduced until at the 6-inch point it is almost one half of the original. The chief engineer of the London Gramophone Co., who make the Decola, claims this is not true of that machine since the pickup is correctly designed, but he does admit a loss of

2 db in gain. Maybe our ears deceived us but it seemed to us the "highs" became less intense as the recording advanced on the Decola.

There will be more to say about these new high-fidelity recordings, especially when Decca is able to send out review copies.

* * *

In the rush of last-minute activities for the December issue, we had to omit prices on several sets (these included the children's albums). The printer set prices in zeros, which we ordered deleted but our deletions were ignored. Ordinarily, comment on such matters would not be required, but we have received a few cards which aimed to be humorous—as though the zeros meant such sets were free of charge. Optimism runs high among record buyers.

Also we had to use smaller print in the review section in December to get all copy in the magazine. Some criticism of this procedure has come our way. Most readers seem to be unaware that the paper situation is still not good, and even if we wished to add more pages we could not do so. What extra paper can be acquired is held in reserve for new subscriptions which in the past year have been voluminous. Production costs of publications are today at an all-time high—double what they were two years ago. The impending threat of a strike in the printing trade does not leave any publisher in a happy frame of mind. Since such matters affect the consumer in the long run, we feel our commenting upon them is not remiss. Rest assured the readers' interests are primarily in our minds—our motto is, and always will be, a periodical "dedicated to a freedom of expression in the field it serves, to the interest of its readers".

It had been our contention to survey this month the record scene for the past year, but there was such a large amount of new recordings we had to postpone the survey. The demand on space also necessitated a change in set-up in the articles.

A Happy New Year to all!



THE AUTOMATIC RECORD CHANGER

By John M. Raynor

In an article in the September issue, I discussed various means by which the prospective buyer of the phonograph or combination might practically judge the quality of reproduction as well as the design and construction of any new instrument. Since discussion of automatic record changers is an involved one, all reference to them was side-tracked in my earlier article.

As I stated previously, there is a multitude of phonographs and combinations available. And there are as many automatic record changers on the market. Not a few of these are of poor design and cheap construction, and given to erratic performance. For example, there is the changer that refuses to change properly some types of records for no apparent reason. Such a changer is probably sensitive to variations in the thickness of records—thus reflecting poor design. I therefore warn the buyer and urge him to inspect carefully and observe in actual operation any changer he may consider.

All the automatic record changers now manufactured are of the drop-automatic variety, with two exceptions—the Capehart turnover changer and the Garrard Model RC100 turnover, both excellent but expensive mechanisms which actually do turn records over. The drop-changer, however, is so arranged that the records to be played are placed on supports, in proper side sequence. (Records used on drop-changers, as most of us know, must be pressed in a different sequence than the old and conventional way where the disc is first played on

one side and then is turned over for the other side. In the case of the drop-sequence sets, the first side is on the top of the first disc, the second on top of the second disc, and so on. Columbia designates this type of album by the prefix "MM" before its number, Decca by "DA", and Victor by "DM".) The turntable spindle on the drop changer is unusually long, since it goes through the center holes of the stacked records. By a separating mechanism, which I shall explain in more detail below, each disc is dropped onto the turntable after the previous one has been played (actually only the first rests directly on the turntable, the others are piled up, in playing order on top of one another, to be played in their turn by the pickup).

Records are separated in one of two ways, according to the type of drop-changer used. The first type holds the discs above the turntable on two, three or even four supports, arranged around the outside of the turntable. As mentioned above, the spindle has been elongated sufficiently to permit it to go through all the center holes of the stacked discs in order to locate and guide them properly in loading and in dropping them respectively into playing position. Blades, knives, or fingers—I shall call them by the general term "separators", for they separate the bottom and the next-to-the-bottom discs—are actually what the records rest upon on the supports. When the changer mechanism is "tripped" (by which I mean the pickup has set the changer mechanism into operation or the "repeat" control has been brought

into play), the separators slide between the bottom disc about to be dropped onto the turntable and the next-to-the-bottom one securely supporting the latter before removing the support from the bottom disc, and thus permitting it to fall. The separators then return to their idle position which then places the formerly next-to-the-bottom disc in the bottom position and so on.

The second type of drop-changer holds the discs to be played above the turntable on one support and on an offset notch in the turntable spindle. In this type of mechanism, the spindle is slightly bent towards the supporting post, the bend occurring just below the notch, so it can be seen; it does not revolve but is stationary. The reason for the bend is that the spindle goes through the center holes of the stacked records in order to guide them, since the records must rest on the support and the offset notch on the spindle at a slight angle. When the mechanism goes through its operative "cycle" (the process of changing one record) either the whole support or just one finger, depending on the make of changer, pushes the bottom record out of the spindle notch so that it falls into playing position. As in the first type, the next-to-the-bottom disc then falls into position as the bottom one. Possibly the reader is wondering why the record is not broken or damaged when it falls into playing position. This is because when it falls it compresses the air between the turntable, or records on the turntable, and itself. This air compression acts as a cushion to the falling disc, protecting it from damage when it lands.

Of the two types just mentioned the latter, i.e., that in which the records are stacked on one support and an offset spindle, is preferred. This type of mechanism is not sensitive to warped records with poor edges (edges are poor when they are not smooth and are full of places in which a sharp point or edge could be caught), since it does not use separators (whose failing I shall describe shortly). If a poor changer is found of this class, its biggest fault will probably be in the scratching of the labels around the center holes. This may result in the elongation or enlargement of the record hole, which in turn may result in the uneven spinning of the record and cause a "wow" or an off-pitch performance. If the center hole does become elongated the record buyer should not

lay the blame on the record manufacturer, as do a great many people who are unaware of the shortcomings of various component parts of their machines.

The other type of changer, using separators, if well designed can give generally trouble-free performance. If trouble arises, this is usually due to one of the separators in its slicing process between the bottom and the next-to-the-bottom record hitting one or the other of the discs squarely on its edge. If the separator is a blade, well polished and rounded at its edge with a little play or "slop" to move slightly upwards or downwards, it will likely slide upwards or downwards, as the case may be, depending on what record was involved, and then in between the records as it should. However, if the separator is a knife-edge affair—and some are—with no vertical "slop", the knife-edge may lodge in the record, thus "jamming" the changer mechanism. Such jamming can unsheathe a Columbia disc, since Columbias have laminated surfaces of heavy paper coated with a material that makes up the playing surface from the body of the record. This jamming can also badly chip or scratch the edges and outermost grooves of any make of disc. While this changer can be, as I stated above, virtually trouble-free when well designed, it nevertheless always has the potential power to jam, being especially sensitive to warped, too thick, or too thin records.

The operation of the pickup is the next consideration. At the completion of any change cycle the pickup is placed on the edge of the disc to be played usually to land almost in the first groove. The pickup should be lowered gently onto the record, not banged down, since the latter action may scar the edge of the first groove. The record buyer will notice that whereas the pickup arm in most changers is mounted on the very end of the arm, there are some in which the pivot point has been moved forward and in which the fulcrum (or pivot point) is almost at the center of the arm. This forward movement in the fulcrum position results in a smoother separation of the arm.

Most changers give a "kick" inward to the pickup so as to place it in the first groove if it has landed on the edge of the disc. This "kick inward" feature is very fine but beware when the kick succeeds in running the stylus or needle over several grooves! I have seen

changers give a kick to the pickup that sent it in fully half an inch! Needless to say, the record was badly scratched. This is a consideration that I urge the buyer to observe carefully in order to save grief at a later date. As for the pickup itself, I refer the reader to my earlier article in the September issue, which covers this matter thoroughly.

The pickup may trip the changer mechanism in one of two places, depending on the make of the changer. The trip may be operated by the inward motion of the pickup as it rides in the lead-in grooves to the eccentric circle, or terminal center of the disc, or the trip may be operated by the outward motion given the pickup by the eccentric circle. Of the two trips, the former is the better because all records have lead-in grooves but not all have eccentric terminal centers. Furthermore, the listener is saved all the swish, rumble, and generally unpleasant noise that the pickup may cause if it does have to travel all the way into the terminal center.

There are some final considerations. Does the changer operate quietly outside of the gentle "plop" when the record is dropped? The changer should go through its change cycle with a minimum of noise. Does the changer go through its cycle in the minimum of time—say less than five seconds? Some changers actually operate in less than five seconds. However, if you buy or consider buying a turn-over changer, the Capehart for example, do not condemn it because it takes so long to change records (20 seconds to be exact); the record in this changer must go through a complicated operation in being turned over. The Garrard RC100, incidentally, operates on a simpler basis and takes only ten seconds to turn the disc over. Finally, beware of a changer that exhibits an alteration of pitch—the pitch of the music or speech will begin to rise at the start of the disc. This behavior indicates that the turn-table motor, which also operates the changer mechanism, is not strong enough for its required job; the changer slows it down and it does not have sufficient time to "come up" to the proper speed before the music begins. There is little to be gained in buying a cheap changer with a cheap motor. A speed control is especially advantageous on a motor since it permits the user actually to keep the speed regular at 78 r.p.m., or to accelerate

or retard the speed of any record as desired. Further, a governor-controlled motor is less liable to fluttering due to changes in line voltage and shows the least amount of variation in speed between the first and last record of a stack.

For those who have found this discussion an involved one (maybe too much so), I am going to recommend two makes of drop-changers that are excellent. They are the Webster (Models 50 and 56) and the Garrard Mixer Changer (Model RC60). The latter type plays both 10 and 12 records intermixed, and is therefore more expensive, but by many considered well worth its price. The Webster changers play either 10 or 12 records but *not* the two intermixed. Both these changers use the aforementioned preferred type of stacking records and both are rapid in operation. The Garrard may be had for A.C. or D.C. operation.

The proper care of changers is very important. They should be kept clean, particularly of stray needles which might work themselves down into the changer mechanism and jam it. A good policy is to take a little vasoline and rub some on the record separators, if this is the type of changer in use. However, wipe *all* the vasoline off after applying it; a very thin coating will be left even after vigorous rubbing, and a thin coating is all that is necessary. This treatment, I have found, is almost a *must* for the slide tracks of a Capehart changer. An application once a month should be sufficient. If such treatment is given a changer, care must be taken to keep the treated parts free of dust. Again, let me say, make sure you wipe *all* the vasoline off. Finally, there is the required lubrication of the changer mechanisms. For some strange reason, it never enters the heads of a large majority of people that the reason their changers do not work properly is because they need, like all mechanical devices, oiling once in a while. However, I do not mean to have one go to the extreme of virtually swimming the changer mechanism in oil so that it drips all over. Read the instruction book on the proper lubrication of the changer and do exactly as it says. If you are in doubt, or do not have an instruction book, call in a reliable serviceman to lubricate and generally look over your changer. Most good servicemen, from sad experience, know what as well as what

not to do in lubricating a changer mechanism.

In closing, if the changer goes "berserk" call in a reliable serviceman who has a good reputation in handling out-of-order record changers. More records are broken and more changers are ruined by inexperienced hands trying to make repairs. If a person ruins his own changer and records by meddling, he really deserves the result.



The Swiss Record Scene

By G. S. Canning & F. F. Clough

Part III — An Evaluation

Interesting as discographic research can be, using only catalogue information and other printed sources, the actual hearing of some of the listed material is a better reward for one's labors. The material quality of the discs we heard, though not perfect, was well above average. While the Swiss manufacture does not quite equal the highest grade of English disc in surface and finish, its results are quite up to the best European war-time efforts, and generally better than the war-time French and Italian pressings we have heard.

Paul Sandoz, the baritone, gave us the most pleasurable experience from the Swiss records heard to date. He has a smooth and controlled voice of considerable range and power; a voice, in fact, capable of dealing adequately with both the lyric baritone roles in opera and the bass arias in oratorio. Originally bent upon a technical career, Sandoz soon abandoned such studies to enter the musical conservatoire at Neuchatel, where he obtained a diploma as teacher of singing. Subsequently he studied in the opera section

of the Basel conservatoire. From there he was engaged by the municipal theatre at Strasbourg, returning later to Switzerland to sing at the Lucerne theatre. Since 1941, he has been singing at the Basel municipal opera in a varied repertoire. Although he now sings German faultlessly, he is by birth French, having spent his early years among the Jura foothills not far from Neuchatel. Sandoz's set of *Dichterliebe* we rate as the best item among so many good ones now considered. The set has many advantages over its competitors: first-rate recording with a full bass, excellent piano tone, and a fine balance between the voice and the keyboard instrument. Of the extremely strong competition that this set has to meet, we may set aside all feminine efforts at singing these eminently masculine songs, and also the Huesch version (H.M.V.), which, while well reproduced, is decidedly not one of his best recordings vocally. The far better performance by Panzéra and Cortot is the one we have chosen as a standard of comparison. Recently, a strong competitor, the Danish tenor Aksel Schiottz, has made this cycle with the aid of Gerald Moore (H.M.V. DB-6270/72). Though much esteemed by English connoisseurs of lieder singing, this set in our opinion does not offer the same fine recording we find in the Sandoz. Sandoz and Baumgartner adopt slightly faster tempos than Panzéra and Cortot, which, while lending an acceptable exhilaration to the interpretation, do not allow for certain nuances that Panzéra is able to achieve. The piano tone of Cortot is definitely pallid in comparison to Baumgartner's, and when this advantage is taken into consideration along with the fresh, young voice of Sandoz and the fine recording, it can be said that this set is in many ways the best available.

There is no competitive material available in the case of Sandoz's recording of Beethoven's *Gellert-Lieder, Opus 48*. His is the first complete version of the cycle and, excepting the well-known *Creation Hymn*, virtually the first authentic one of any of the songs. These little-known lieder reveal a neglected aspect of Beethoven's art, and the set should go a long way towards establishing a wider appreciation of them. An outstanding feature of the set, as of the *Dichterliebe*, is Sandoz's impeccable diction, and the sensitive organ accompaniments of Karl Mat-

thaei. There is a welcome hall resonance to the production as well as a good balance. There was one spot of momentary roughness, however, on side 3, where a 32-foot stop on the organ is used, but this may not cause trouble on all machines. The filler-up to this set, the Handel-Ochs Arioso *Dank sei Dir, Herr*, is also noteworthy for sympathetic interpretation. Comparing it with the Huesch disc (EH 925), with its over-lush orchestration, we prefer the Sandoz recording. The latter's voice, while slightly darker in tone, is freer in production, and we like better his organ and cello solo accompaniment.

The only other disc by Sandoz obtained by us contains two extracts from the Bach *St. Matthew Passion* (DB10061). It is well recorded and vocally splendid. Our only criticism is the use of the organ, which though well played, cannot entirely replace the original orchestra. In order to get the arioso and aria onto two sides the *da capo* is confined to the opening bars.

A Gluck Concerto

The next most interesting discs are those recorded by the Winterthur Orchestra under Dr. Herman Scherchen. The Gluck *Concerto in G major* (for flute and orchestra) is a really charming work, although scholars seem unable to agree on its authenticity. Dr. Scherchen has edited it from manuscript sources, and it certainly is a delightful piece of 18th-century rococo, well worth rescuing from oblivion. When the recording is compared with English examples of music of its period, it stands the test very well indeed. The solo part is well played by the young Swiss flutist, Willi Urfer. To judge from other examples of the Scherchen recordings heard by radio, this pair of discs, to which some tuneful Rameau dances form a well chosen fourth side, are among the best of the series and can be wholeheartedly recommended. The recording of the *Symphony in B flat* by Gaspard Fritz is adequate by all normal standards, though American listeners may need to reduce the bass a little. This work of a Geneva composer of the mid-18th century (1716-1783) is interesting from the historical aspect, as the wide field offered by the many composers of this period has been shamefully neglected on records. The Polydor war-time series of Cannabich, Stamitz,

Wagenseil, Leopold Mozart, etc., is not at present available, and may never be; so that virtually the only examples to hand of these precursors of Haydn and Mozart are some English Decca discs by the Boyd Neel Orchestra which are not particularly well recorded. The Fritz symphony, composed about 1755, reveals considerable melodic invention and ability of construction, and is thoroughly worthwhile listening.

Coming now to the pianist Paul Baumgartner, we turn first to his recording of the Beethoven *Sonata, Opus 81a (Les Adieux)*. Technically, these discs are good, and well deserving of the prize offered by the Swiss journal *Die Weltwoche*. There is a well-balanced, rich piano tone, and on all technical counts these records are many stages in advance of their most recent competitor, the Rubinstein set (Victor and H.M.V.). Baumgartner's technique is not as sensational as Rubinstein's, but if his performance of the work is not virtuosic in conception and execution this is not adverse criticism, for it is an eminently musically presentation, youthful and yet restrained. He has adopted too fast a tempo in the slow movement, in which an awkwardly contrived break might have been avoided; but apart from this the recording is praiseworthy.

The Bach *Chromatic Fantasia and Fugue* offers similar attractive qualities. The piano tone is not recorded so opulently as in the Beethoven, but is appropriate to the music. The interpretation is again restrained: a slower tempo in the fugue produces an acceptable clarity in the inner parts, and offers proof of Baumgartner's musically insight into problems of interpretation. Even before 1939, Baumgartner was beginning to make a name outside of his native Switzerland as a sincere and musically executant of the classics of piano literature, and the records we have heard certainly confirm that reputation.

A Pupil of Cortot

Susanne Gyr is a young pianist, born in Lorraine, a pupil of Cortot and Nadia Boulanger; she had just begun a promising career in France at the outbreak of war in 1939. Later, she settled in Geneva and married Edouard Gyr, a violinist in the Orchestre Romande. For three years after her arrival in Switzerland she remained quite unknown,

but she used this interval for the perfection of her technique, and has subsequently been widely acclaimed in Switzerland as one of the most significant of the younger pianists. The recordings we have heard certainly bear out this reputation. Her version of the Mozart *Fantasia* and *Sonata in C minor* faces comparison with the well-nigh perfect recordings made for Parlophone by Lili Kraus. The latter's high standard in interpretation is not quite attained by Mme. Gyr, but on its own it is a highly satisfactory performance. The piano tone, while not outstandingly brilliant, is adequate, and Mme. Gyr's interpretation shows an appreciable understanding of Mozart's style. One point in the pianist's favor is her choice of breaks, which are made in much less disturbing places than those of Lili Kraus.

The lovely Fauré *Nocturne No. 6* is one of the works with which Mme. Gyr made her reputation, and her recording shows how her origin and training have given her complete understanding of the French school. Technique and musical insight are well matched in an eloquent realization of Fauré's reticent pages. Mme. Gyr's version of Ravel's *Tombeau de Couperin* offers the best example of her artistry we have heard. Hers is a sympathetic and understanding performance of this music, a great advance over the early Polydor issue by Mlle. Varmalite, since the piano tone is realistic and does justice to the nuanced playing of the artist.

A Great Lieder Singer

To collectors of lieder records the name of Ria Ginster is well known. Born in Frankfurt in 1903, she has been since 1938 a Professor at the Zürich Conservatoire. Those who have prized her pre-1939 recordings will be pleased to hear that the beauty of her voice is still undiminished. Her set of the Schumann *Frauenliebe und Leben* is certainly the best recorded of those we know. The splendid piano playing of Paul Baumgartner, perfectly balanced with the voice, contributes largely to the excellence of the general effect. If interpretatively Mme. Ginster does not excel the 1928 version of Lotte Lehmann, she definitely eclipses the latter's more recent Columbia set, where Lehmann's voice is no longer heard at its best. Moreover, the woodenly recorded piano tone of Bruno Walter is a shortcoming with which

Mme. Ginster does not have to cope, since the fine accompaniments of Baumgartner are excellently reproduced.

Our admiration of Ginster's Schumann is not extended to her recording of Brahms' *Gestillte Sehnsucht* and *Geistliches Wiegenlied*. Although these are sung with her usual intelligence and sensitivity, we feel that they demand a darker vocal quality to mate with the tone of the accompanying viola. Mme. Ginster's soprano is too light to do this. Yet her interpretation must be commended for its lyrical beauty and technical assurance. The balance between the voice and the viola and piano could have been advantageously contrived to give more prominence to the singer. We in England have not been given the chance to know Marian Anderson's well-received recording of these songs, but comparing Mme. Ginster with the English Decca set by Nancy Evans, we prefer the former.

Margherita Perras

Another name well known to connoisseurs of vocal recordings is that of the Greek soprano Margherita Perras, now a Swiss subject. It is comforting to report that she is singing as well as ever. Her recording of two Bach arias (DB10093) shows off her limpid, flexible voice to its best advantage. The well known *My Heart Ever Faithful* from *Cantata 68* is the less perfect of the two: the tempo is a little slow and the lack of the orchestra is felt, although Meyer's organ playing is in the proper style. The other aria, *Seufzer, Traenen*, benefits greatly from a well played oboe obbligato by Marcel Saillet, and certainly this side, which has no competition, is completely successful. The recording has a spacious hall effect which commends itself to our ears, tired as we are of so much studio recording. On all points we recommend this disc to Bach admirers. Her other discs we have are part of the series sponsored by the Swiss Composers' Association, and include five songs by the eminent composer Othmar Schoeck (b.1886) who secures the authenticity of the recording by playing the piano parts himself. The songs offer none of the usual asperities associated with contemporary composers but are straightforward settings of poems by Lenau, Spitteler, Heine and Eichendorff, in a style reminiscent of 19th-century German romantics. They are charmingly sung by Mme.

Perrars. Also in the Swiss composers' series are two discs by Else Scherz-Meister (soprano), accompanied by K. Rothenbuehler, of songs by Honegger. These are unreservedly successful. The idiom of Honegger is, of course, in the sharpest contrast to that of Schoeck, and even between the two Honegger discs there is a difference in feeling. The setting of *Saluste du Bartas* is in the idiom of "Les Six" — a light, frivolous, character drawing, attractive and typically French. The Claudel poems reveal a far deeper emotion, and the last song builds to a powerful climax. The soprano gives as persuasive a rendering of these songs as one could hope for, which is all the more praiseworthy as we last heard her by radio singing, equally competently, Bach cantatas in German. The piano accompaniments are good.

We next come to a relatively unknown name, that of Else Fink (soprano), whose recording of Dvorák's *Gypsy Songs*, Opus 55 is made with the collaboration of Mme. Gyr. Apart from the very old Pathé version by Mme. Krausova (not available for many years), this is the first complete recording of this cycle, of which only the ubiquitous *Songs My Mother Taught Me* is really well known. Else Fink offers a natural, eager and unsophisticated rendering of these Bohemian melodies; obviously she has the right background, for she conveys the inner meaning of the songs, and even the hackneyed one loses its frayed sentimentality in her rendition. Her voice, however, is not immediately attractive, nor is it a particularly powerful one. Mme. Fink is an Austrian by birth and a Czech by marriage. The piano tone in the accompaniment is satisfactory, but the balance at times is slightly in favor of the instrument rather than the singer.

In the recording of Schubert's *Du bist die Ruh'* and *Erlkoenig*, made by Marko Rothmueller (baritone), Mme. Gyr's accompaniments are far from revealing the qualities of her solos and the vocal interpretations are not truly convincing. M. Rothmueller is an operatic baritone of considerable experience; he has sung leading roles at the Zürich opera for some ten or more years. Besides his vocal work, he is said to have studied composition with Alban Berg. His voice is truly heroic, and perhaps for that reason not best used in the lieder of Schubert; certainly in

Du bist die Ruh' there is too much seeking for dramatic effect and verbal veracity at the expense of legato and beauty of tone. The dramatic emphasis and preoccupation with the meaning of the text is better suited to *Erlkoenig*; the slow initial tempo here works up to a good climax but this is not as impressive as the mysterious *parlando* on the final words, in the famous rendition of Marta Fuchs. The important piano part is unfortunately lacking in bass, so altogether this recording is rather disappointing. To judge by a radio performance by M. Rothmueller of the Moussorgsky *Songs and Dances of Death*, the latter would have been more likely to evoke a favorable report, as he obviously is more suited to this style of work.

We must conclude this survey of an interesting group of records by a few general observations. We do not need to point to the wide repertoire which has been covered in these issues, a praiseworthy effort indeed in the face of temptations to go for the easy and the commonplace. The fact that there are so many unique or first complete recordings is proof of this. We are particularly impressed by the excellent diction of all the vocalists. It is a real pleasure to hear the words properly enunciated. When Paul Sandoz is singing in German and Mme. Scherz-Meister in French, the advantages of the Swiss bi- and tri-lingual culture is self-evident. (Incidentally, it is not generally known that Panzéra, regarded by some as the most successful exponent of Schumann's *Dichterliebe* on records — although criticized by others for his over-precise handling of the German language — is also of Swiss origin.) Another very commendable feature of the Swiss recordings is the furnishing with the song recordings of leaflets giving the texts — even the copyright text of the Claudel poems is provided. Finally, a word in praise of the tasteful type used on the labels. The whole is a tribute to Swiss culture and enterprise, and we hope this article will serve to arouse the interest the recordings deserve. It is our opinion that a number of these recordings would achieve renown if they were pressed in England and America, with the added advantage of better record material. It has been owing to the generous cooperation of Messrs. Hug & Co. of Basel that we were able to hear a representative selection of the Swiss H.M.V. products.

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We believe that record buyers would do well to order by title rather than by number such items as they may wish to purchase. Numbers are sometimes printed incorrectly in our sources.

All prices given are without tax.

Orchestra

BEETHOVEN: *Symphony No. 4 in B flat major, Opus 60*; played by the London Philharmonic Orchestra, direction of Sir Thomas Beecham. Victor set M- or DM-1081, four discs, price \$4.85.

▲ The English writer, H. L. Wilson, says "the kinship which Teetgen finds between Beethoven and Shakespeare is no more fascinatingly evident, in his opinion, than in the *Fourth Symphony*. The enchanting spirit of the poet's fairy plays are echoed in the work of the musician . . .". Tovey approaches this work on more erudite grounds, and rightly remarks on the spirits of Haydn and Mozart in the music. I think Tovey does as much as anyone to enhance the listener's

enjoyment of this lovely, lyrical score. The *Fourth* is unquestionably overshadowed by the *Eroica* and the *Fifth*, but in its scheme of things it is no less important. That Beethoven could have achieved a work of such joie de vivre and humor between those other works is no less a miracle than are the more elevated and sombre scores.

The history of the *Fourth* on records reveals two early recordings—one by Dr. Weissmann and another by Dr. Pfitzner—in the middle '20s. The next recording was by Casals (1930), then came those by Weingartner and Ormandy (middle '30s), and in 1940 came Toscanini's—the most searching performance of the work to date. How grateful were many of us to Dr. Weissmann for his performance in the old days. The Casals was badly recorded. The Weingartner was better, and although a musically treatment of the score it lacked the imagination that we find in Toscanini and now in Beechman.

Elsewhere I have remarked on the inadvisability of becoming "ear-conditioned" to one performance of a work. Beecham's reading is so fine within itself that one does not want to compare it with Toscanini's. Moreover, it is a little better reproduced, I will not say much better for the recording does not have the brilliance of higher frequencies we find in American recordings. But it has fine clarity of line and detail, which is, of course, due to the work of the conductor. In his clarification of detail I find Beecham frequently a bit on the mettulous side, Toscanini accomplishes this sor-

of thing with a spontaneity of spirit which few achieve. There is no lack of elation or humor in Beecham's reading, yet I feel Toscanini's tempi in the Scherzo and finale are more exhilarating. But the nuance of line and phrase that Beecham obtains in the finale is a fine example of his amazing musical gifts. The reader is invited to hear both set; for both offer extraordinary readings of a delightful symphony.

—P.H.R.

BRAHMS: *Symphony No. 2 in D major, Opus 73*; played by the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra, direction of Pierre Monteux. Victor set M- or DM-1065, four discs, price \$4.85.

▲ Up until recent years, Brahms' *Second Symphony* was heard far more often than any of the others. I still think if a vote on popularity were taken with a wide cross-section of music lovers, that the *Second* would emerge as the greatest favorite. The late Fuller-Maitland as early as 1911 stated the case for this work when he said "the symphony is not only scored all through with more regard to popular effect, but its material is of such comparatively slight quality that it can be appreciated to some extent by uncultivated hearers, and it is full of points of beauty that are easily understood." The slow movement is one of Brahms' noblest, a thing of sombre poetic beauty. The opening melody, richly voiced by the cellos, is romantic song, to which few can listen without being emotionally touched. The warmly lyric qualities of the symphony, its often idyllic substance, have led many to call its Brahms' *Pastoral Symphony*, and continued acquaintance with this work substantiates this sobriquet. The late Lawrence Gilman, a true Brahmsian disciple, felt strongly the pastoral qualities in the opening of the first movement and in the *Allegretto grazioso*. Brahms' love of Nature is often expressed in his music, and he is not only most accessible at such times but most appealing. These facts have led interpreters of this work to sentimentalize it, to indulge in excessive tonal undulations and lingering over passages of sentiment.

The last observation brings us to Monteux and his performance of this work. The noted French conductor refrains from such

excesses, his performance is a model of clarity, both tonally and rhythmically. His clarification of the instrumentation shows an uncanny perceptiveness in such matters, indeed he alone of all conductors achieves the true balance of parts in the performance of this work. There have been others who have more ideally contrasted the meditative qualities of the score with its more outward, rhythmic drama. Mr. Monteux plays up the latter sections in a manner that is quite exciting, but never superficially so. Beecham and Weingartner have both given us fine performances on records, but neither had the benefit of the clarity and realism of reproduction that we encounter here, and in view of this Monteux's version of the symphony emerges well in the foreground. It is so good, so compellingly played that one has no wish to disturb the pleasure of the experience with a direct comparison with any other performance on records. If listeners, fresh with the renditions of Beecham or Weingartner, are not similarly swayed with this recording it will be because they are unable to free themselves from long experienced effects—a dangerous state of being in which, I feel, far too many record listeners are immersed. There is room for the duplications of all great works of music, particularly when they are as comprehending and vitally accomplished as this one is.

—P.H.R.

BRAHMS: *Symphony No. 3 in F, Op. 90*; played by the Philadelphia Orchestra. Eugene Ormandy, conductor. Columbia Set M- or MM 642, 4 discs, price \$4.85.

▲ Until Victor's release of this symphony over a year ago, played by the Boston Symphony Orchestra under the leadership of Serge Koussevitzky, there had never been a recorded performance that was thoroughly satisfactory. Brilliantly played and recorded, even that set left something to be desired in the vagaries of tempo in the last movement, the second subject being paced more slowly than the main subject, without rhyme or reason.

Of the previous recordings, those of Willem Mengelberg and Felix Weingartner offered splendid interpretations, but they were thin and poorly balanced. On the other hand, those of Bruno Walter, Frederick Stock and Hans Kindler, while well re-

corded, left much to be desired from other standpoints. The ancient version by Leopold Stokowski (which still remains in the catalogue) need not be taken into consideration, for more reasons than one.

Ormandy's reading, while not as brilliantly recorded nor as eloquent in the slow movement as Koussevitzky's, is eminently satisfying in all other respects. Ormandy rightfully follows the example of Mengelberg in having a few violins play the melody unadorned during the last nine bars of the finale, thus bringing it to the fore in a way that Brahms was unable to do with his arpeggiated figures. This is legitimate touching-up, surely.

This, the least popular of the Brahms symphonies (in this country, at any rate), is to many musicians the most cherishable of the four. It represents Brahms at the height of his powers, and is free of the prolixity which occasionally mars his other symphonies. In spite of the mysterious passages of the *andante*, which must have sounded very strange to ears of 1883, the symphony was hugely successful at its first and subsequent performances; and served to confirm the high regard in which Brahms was held as a symphonist after he published his two previous works in this form a few years before.

Every musician will have his own idea of the way such a familiar symphony as this should be interpreted. In fact, the more familiar the music, the more difficult the choice between recordings available for purchase. Therefore we suggest that the prospective buyer hear both this set and the one by Koussevitzky before he decides on which recording he wishes to own. —H.S.G.

GRIEG: *Holberg Suite, Opus 40; (Aus Holberg Zeit)*, played by the Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra, direction of Rudolph Ganz. Pilotone Set DA 301, four 10-inch discs price \$4.50.

▲ Grieg's *Holberg Suite* is one of his most cherishable works. Written in the style and form of the rococo period of its namesake, it shows the composer's ability to enter the spirit of another age and yet retain his own individuality and charm. Ludvig Holberg (1684-1754) was a famous Norwegian poet, of which it has been said "perhaps no author who ever lived has had so vast an in-

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fluence over his countrymen". In 1884, celebrating the two hundredth anniversary of the poet's birth, a statue of him was to be unveiled. It was planned to have Grieg write a cantata to be sung at the ceremony but the composer was not inspired in his writing. In a letter two months before the ceremony, he wrote a friend that he was "bored writing poor music" but making up for it "by catching good fish". The idea of the suite in the old style, utilizing the 18th-century dance forms, was Grieg's independent tribute to the memory of the great Norwegian poet. He composed it first for piano and played it four days after the unveiling of the statue in a concert at Bergen where the cantata he preferred to disown was also performed. Later, he scored the suite for string orchestra.

Mr. Ganz plays this music with sympathetic feeling but the string orchestra he has at his command is not as well balanced as the one Walter Goehr had in his recording (Victor set 792); there is a thinness of tone in the first violins and not as fine a balance of parts. The recording seems to have been accomplished in a studio since there is little evidence of room resonance behind the tone.

It is unfortunate that Pilot regarded it essential to give the first two record faces over to a spoken commentary by Mr. Deems Taylor. What Mr. Taylor has to say might better have appeared in print; if one is in the mood for music one is apt to be impatient with the best speaker, even a Maurice Evans or a Laurence Olivier which Mr. Taylor decidedly is not. It is not what Mr. Taylor has to say that one resents but rather the fact that he cannot be easily eliminated in subsequent hearings of the music via one's changer. Pilot deserves commendation on the quiet surfaces of its discs, and one looks forward to other ventures of this newcomer in the field.

—P.H.R.

HAYDN: *Symphony No. 45 in F sharp minor (Farewell)*; played by the Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra, direction of Erich Leinsdorf. Pilotone Set DA302, four 10-inch discs, price \$4.50.

▲ This is one of two symphonic recordings issued by Pilot Radio Corp. of New York. The recording is tonally good but poorly balanced in some sections, thus the strings

dominate in the opening movement and the oboes and horns are scarcely heard as they should be. Prefacing the recording of the symphony are two record sides given over to a commentary by Deems Taylor. This sort of thing is rather deadly on records as the bigger companies found out years ago. Since the set is an automatic-sequence one the buyer will have a hard time avoiding Mr. Taylor's remarks. It would have been much wiser to have printed Mr. Taylor's commentary and allowed the conductor more time for his unfoldment of the music. Mr. Leinsdorf gives a forthright reading of the work, but the speed he adopts for the slow movement and the lovely, wistful slow section of the finale destroys the expressive qualities of the music. If one returns to the recording of Sir Henry Wood and the London Symphony Orchestra (Columbia set 205), one will find the tempo adopted more in keeping with Haydn's markings and the playing of the above mentioned parts of the score far more appealing. Wood's set, made around the end of 1934, still sounds well on modern equipment and has much to recommend it, for Wood was an understanding conductor of this composer.

The *Farewell Symphony* lies midway in Haydn's symphonic works, but as in all symphonies written in a minor key there is a special underlying dramatic purpose. The first movement employs a downward scale figure as an opening theme; there is no introduction. It is a dramatic thrust in purpose that Haydn aims for here rather than melodic shapeliness. Wood supplies the drama which Leinsdorf glosses over. There is a wistful heart quality to the slow movement, and the minuet is unusual in that it is written in the minor key. The finale begins in the usual bustling manner of so many of Haydn's last movements, but it has a most unusual lengthy coda in which one instrument after another becomes silent until at the end only two violins are playing. Haydn devised this finale as a protest to his patron who had refused the musicians a holiday. It is said at the original performance the musicians one after another blew out their candles and departed leaving only the first and second violins to play the final graceful and wistful measures. Haydn's mild "musician's strike" had its effect; the prince granted the desired holiday to the

players. Leinsdorf misses the poetic qualities of the final coda, playing it at far too fast a tempo. What remains one of the most endearing and charming of all endings in symphonic music becomes a trite business-like affair with Mr. Leinsdorf. I recommend interested readers to look up the Wood set.

—P.H.R.

LISZT (arr. Mueller-Berghaus): *Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2*; played by the Philadelphia Orchestra, direction of Eugene Ormandy. Columbia disc 12437-D, price \$1.00.

▲ Liszt's Hungarian Rhapsodies at best are a hodge-podge of melodic and rhythmic effects; they are difficult to coordinate into anything resembling a smooth continuity. Brailowsky, in his recent recording of the present rhapsody, showed an appreciation of musical progression which few pianists bother with. Most of them play up effects and project the music in uncoordinated sections. If I am not mistaken this is the same orchestral transcription that Mr. Stokowski used. Its plan is to exploit the various sections of the orchestra with little regard for continuity. Mr. Ormandy shows off his players with a militant exactitude and a showman's assurance. The music is heard as a series of virtuoso episodes exploiting first one group and then another. There is a sumptuous sound from this recording and some brilliant orchestral playing, but with all the glamour of sound it leaves me with the feeling that transcribers and conductors can willfully or otherwise make even more of a hodge-podge of Liszt than that fabulous composer-pianist did himself. For my part, I am willing to accept Brailowsky's record even though the color scheme is less vivid.

—P.H.R.

MIASKOVSKY: *Symphony No. 21, Opus 51*; played by USSR National Symphony Orchestra, direction of Rachlin. Compass Set C-103, three 10-inch discs, price \$3.75.

▲ This symphony is the work of a traditionalist who has something to say. There is much of the brooding quality of musical thought that is associated with the Russian creative mind, but Miaskovsky unlike his contemporaries has a classical bent, and his music grows out of itself making use of imitative devices, fugal developments and a

general preference for polophonic writing. We have had very little of Miaskovsky on records and this sample of his some twenty-five symphonies to date is most welcome. In November 1937, Victor gave us a *Sinfonietta* for string orchestra, played by Frank Black and the defunct NBC String Symphony Orchestra (in set 390). The present work in one, consistent movement, is a work of considerably more depth than his *Sinfonia*, and it is more richly scored. It is made up of five sections—a slow, brooding opening and closing, with three allegros each followed by a brief slower insert. A first experience with this recording without the score confirms an earlier impression, gained when I heard Mr. Ormandy play the work several years back, that Miaskovsky deserves more recognition than he has received to date with recorders. His *Violin Concerto*, which obviously stemming from the 19th-century romantic school, is nonetheless an original score and more appealing than a lot of concertos that are played more frequently. It has been recorded in Russia and it is to be hoped Compass will import it and re-issue it here. It was released in England in October 1943, and favorably received.

The present work is sound music-making, the sort of work which requires close concentration. Irving Kolodin has written excellent notes for the set, and given a comprehensive description of the score.

Compass records are all made in Russia and the labels are printed in the original language but the numbers on the discs give a clear clue to the sequence of the performance. I find these original Russian discs much better reproducibly than most of the re-pressings of Russian recorded works made in this country. The recording is clearer, much cleaner, and the dynamics much better. There is dry tone to the orchestra since the playing is apparently accomplished in a studio with no room resonant quality. There is a semblance of highs in the reproduction, however, which is all to the good. The recording is in regular sequence.

The conductor here gives the work an earnest and expressive reading, which is what it requires. Mr. Kolodin points this out in his notes, but if memory serves me right Mr. Ormandy gave it similar treatment with the added advantage of a better orchestra.

—P.H.R.



Licia Albanese, Soprano: Selection from *La Traviata*, Act I. RCA Victor Orchestra, Frieder Weissmann, Conductor. Record 11-9331, \$1.00.



Sir Thomas Beecham, Bart.: Symphony No. 4, in B-Flat, Op. 60—Beethoven. London Philharmonic Orchestra. M/DM-1081, \$4.85.



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Arturo Toscanini: *Symphony No. 41, in C, K.551 ("Jupiter")—Mozart*. NBC Symphony Orchestra. Album M/DM-1080, \$4.85.

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MOZART: *Symphony in E flat major, K. 184*; played by the Boston Symphony Orchestra, direction of Serge Koussevitzky. Victor disc 11-9363, price \$1.00.

▲ In December of 1773, Mozart wrote three symphonies (K. 182, 183, 184) for the Salzburg Orchestra and its controversial Archbishop—whose fame one suspects has been sustained more by his association with the composer than with the church. The *G minor Symphony, K. 183* remains one of Mozart's most cherished early symphonies. Of the three composed at this period it is the most arresting and the only true symphony. The present work, like K. 182 in B flat, is really an overture much in the operatic style. The three movements—*Molto presto*, *Andante* and *Allegro*—are connected by modulatory bridge passages. Einstein says that this work is distinctly an overture, "but written for large orchestra, and with so imposingly concerto-like first movement and such subtle and sensitively executed dialogue in the Andante (in C minor) that it would have to be counted among the early masterpieces, if the Finale were not perhaps a little too light for the rest of the work".

One feels that the performance of this symphony would have gained with a smaller and more intimate ensemble. Yet, Einstein's contention that it was for large orchestra should be considered—however, a large orchestra in Mozart's time would not be comparable to one in our day. Koussevitzky's performance tends to inflate this score, his mammoth string section does not allow for the right "adjustment of delicately opposed sonorities" (see end of my review on the *C major Symphony*). I do not think I would go so far as to say—as a well known Boston musician recently wrote me—that the conductor mauls the little work but I have always felt that Koussevitzky misses a great deal in Mozart—the true blend of essential grace and polish. He treats the opening and closing movements too much like Haydn—as though setting their rhythmical pace were all that were necessary. His slow movement is more expressively played and here the orchestral sound seems less inflated. But with all the above comment, one welcomes this disc, for most unfamiliar Mozart is well worth having on a recording.

The reproduction is clear and lifelike, in keeping with the best of the orchestra.

—P.H.R.

MOZART: *Symphony No. 41 in C major (Jupiter), K. 551* (7 sides), and BACH: *Air from the Suite in D major* (1 side); played by the NBC Symphony Orchestra, direction of Arturo Toscanini. Victor set M- or DM-1080, price \$4.85.

▲ Here, at long last, is the performance of the *Jupiter* for which I and others have been waiting for years. When we stop to think about it, it is curious how some of the greatest masterpieces have fared on records. There is no thoroughly satisfactory version of the *Ninth* of Beethoven, nor of the *Fifth* or the *Eroica*—for if you are in agreement with me and feel that Toscanini has given the most satisfactory reading, you will also agree that he has had shamefully bad sounding reproduction in both these works. I suspect the definitive performance of no work will ever exist on records for all listeners—one is attuned to different vibrations and spiritual values, and not all have the same depth of perception. The first electrical recording of the *Jupiter* was by Coates and the London Symphony. It was singularly lacking in sensibility and only in the magnificent finale did the conductor suggest he had more than bowing acquaintance with the composer. Boult's reading was musicianly, but a somewhat tame affair. Bruno Walter has twice recorded the work—with the Vienna Philharmonic and with the New York Philharmonic. The latter set is better played, but the recorded sound of the orchestra is often gaunt and thin in tone. Beecham gives a characteristic reading, one in which sensitivity of line is especially estimable but he does not rise to the drama as fully as Toscanini. The title *Jupiter* seems to be a misnomer and I am and always have been completely in agreement with Tovey, and therefore in disagreement with Mr. Hall in his notes here. One may concede an Olympian grandeur to that marvelous contrapuntal finale, but again I think one English writer, H. L. Wilson, was nearer to the fact when he said that it "leaves even upon the uninitiated the impression of a magnificent princely pageant, to prepare the mind for which has been the office of the previous movements".



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The recording here is splendidly accomplished; it was made in Carnegie Hall in New York and has that tonal liveness that only a good concert hall can provide. As to the performance, it shows that Toscanini has lost none of his art of long years standing. The intensity of his spirit and drive, which has often been criticized, is only felt where it really belongs—in the finale. His opening movement one feels is perfectly paced and finely balanced, his reading of the slow movement—with its calm beauty and passionate agitation—unfolds with a rare serenity and mellowness of spirit. The same English writer (quoted above) once said the impression this movement leaves "is one of moral strength, perfected to a noble gentleness"—Toscanini's reading brings those lines to mind. The emotional buoyancy of the minuet is perfectly calculated; it is in the minuet that Beecham fails to realize the true spirit of the music. At first hearing the finale may seem faster than others play it, but I think the timing is equitable. It is the intensified spirit of Toscanini which gives this impression, but with all his energetic drive the music is never permitted to lose its poise. The late Lawrence Gilman once said of Toscanini's performances of 18th-century music—of Haydn and Mozart especially—"there are lessons for many conductors; lessons in how to refine without finicking, how to achieve nuance without affectation, how to mould a phrase without dislocating its jaw; lessons in the difference between expressiveness that gives point and life; lessons in the adjustment of delicately opposed sonorities". All of those lessons are here in this performance of Mozart's great *C Major Symphony*.

Perhaps the greatest surprise is the Maestro's beautifully poised and exquisitely serene reading of the famous Bachian *Air*.

—P.H.R.

PROKOFIEFF: *Symphony No. 5, Opus 100*; played by Philharmonic-Symphony Orchestra of New York, direction of Artur Rodzinski. Columbia set M- or MM-661, five discs, price \$5.85.

▲ The spotlight falls again on Prokofieff. His *Fifth Symphony*, which the composer conducted for its premiere at Moscow in January 1945, has had a goodly number of

performances in this country since Koussevitzky first performed it in 1945. Rumor has it that Koussevitzky has recorded it, but since such things are not always assured one may well be content with the present performance which is very well done. Rodzinski has played the works several times in public and his reading is now well integrated and planned. This is the sort of score that can be over-played, but Rodzinski shuns the obvious and gives the work an admirably forthright performance; one in which its lyrical episodes are particularly well set forth. I have noted this conductor's feeling for lyricism before, it is one of the estimable aspects of his work. Many readers will have heard this symphony on the air by now, if not in the concert hall, and I know from correspondence that a lot have been awaiting its recording.

Public reception of this work has been most enthusiastic and I suspect that an analysis of its aspects will be glossed over by most listeners. Prokofieff is the big Russian name of the moment; Shostakovich has receded into the background. Of the two, the former is the greater man. Whether the Russians admit it or not, Prokofieff's sojourn beyond the environs of his own country gave him a universality of expression which Shostakovich lacks, and—what is more important—a refinement of purpose. The present work is uneven, as indeed have been all of Prokofieff's compositions composed under the Soviet orbit. Its form is rambling. That it has a fair quota of inspiration few will deny; that it has its pages of let-down critics have already pointed out. The long opening movement is not too coherent; here I feel a strengthening of dramatic content would help. The movement, an *Andante*, builds slowly in a somewhat diffuse, sectional manner. Nestyev, in his book on the composer, goes overboard on this work; he finds this movement one of epic Russian heroism. The scherzo is quite delightful; Nestyev calls it one of the composer's lyrical comedies. It could well have been theater music with its quasi-oriental touches and its bits of sentiment. The long slow movement is songful and has its moments which led me to suspect the composer was going to go Tchaikovsky on us. It is meditative in character, but I cannot feel its implications of "funereal tragedy" as Nestyev does. It

remains a persuasively devised poetical movement, which one suspects made concessions to public taste, for it is singularly consonant throughout for Prokofieff. It is reminiscent of his *Second Violin Concerto*. The finale opens with a slow introduction taken from the opening theme of the first movement but soon becomes a lively satirical dance-like piece that also might have been devised for theater usage. Without imitating Shostakovich the composer deftly paraphrases him in his satirical merriment. For my own part I find this a clever, sure-fire ending.

This composition deserves further contemplation. Not having seen the score I feel I have only skimmed its surface.

The recording here is good but hardly as brilliant or as fully realistic as some other recent ones by this orchestra. I would have liked more highs, but I am afraid my excursion into Decca's FFRR recordings this month has given me an unfair perspective on some domestic issues. The reproduction here on the average machine will undoubtedly be most favorably regarded.

—P.H.R.

STRAVINSKY: *Petroushka—Ballet Suite*; played by the London Philharmonic Orchestra, direction of Ernst Ansermet. Decca FFRR Set No. EDA 2, five discs, price \$11.00.

▲ The reader is referred to the editorial in this issue for a more complete discussion on the new Decca (imported from England) high-fidelity recordings, of which this set is one. Heard on a machine that can reproduce the full range of these discs (30 to 14,000 c.p.s.) every detail in this complicated score is clearly heard with the added magic of an infinite variety of tonal coloring and overtones. Even on an ordinary commercial outfit, this set has its fine points because the performance is cleaner and a far more telling one than any we have had since the Coates-London Symphony one which was released over a decade and a half ago in London. The noted Swiss conductor has long enjoyed an unrivaled reputation for his keen perceptiveness and musical comprehension of modern music, especially that of Stravinsky. He conducted the famed Diaghileff Russian Ballet Orchestra in its extensive tours of Europe, this country and South America.

In his performance here, he handles each section with deft touches and unusual musical understanding. The Stravinsky score is marked *Scenes Burlesques*, and it is the substantiation of the satire, the mimicry and caricature that Ansermet achieves so much more tellingly than anyone I have ever heard. It is unfortunate that no notes are provided with the set, since a knowledge of the scenario is essential to enjoyment of this extraordinarily descriptive score.

In his *Chronicle of my Life*, the composer tells us that before tackling his *Sacre du Printemps*, "...I wanted to refresh myself by composing an orchestral piece in which the piano would play the most important part—a sort of *Konzertstueck*. In composing the music, I had in mind a distinct picture of a puppet, suddenly endowed with life, exasperating the patience of the orchestra with diabolical cascades of arpeggi. The orchestra makes a terrific noise which reaches its climax and ends in the sorrowful and querulous collapse of the poor puppet. Having finished this bizarre piece, I struggled

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for hours . . . to find a title which would express in a word the character of my music and, consequently, the personality of this creature. One day I leapt with joy. I had indeed found my title—*Petroushka*, the immortal and happy hero of every fair in all countries."

Petroushka was the cornerstone of *Le Sacre*, which a great many people regard as Stravinsky's best work. Personality I have always felt that Stravinsky achieved one of his most perfect scores in *Petroushka*; if this work served as an experiment in orchestral writing before the composition of *Le Sacre*, it has turned out to be the more spontaneous creation—the latter remains the real experiment.

—P.H.R.

TIOMKIN: *Musical Excerpts* from David O. Selznik's Technicolor film *Duel In the Sun*; played by the Boston "Pops" Orchestra, direction Arthur Fiedler. Victor set DM-1083, four 10-inch discs, price \$4.00.

▲ *Duel in the Sun* is evidently a lavish technicolor film featuring a group of favorite Hollywood stars. The score, most of the highlights of which are undoubtedly housed in this album, is an elaborate one written by the Russian-born pianist-composer, Dimitri Tiomkin, who has been writing moving picture scores for the past twelve years. I have forgotten the score of *Lost Horizon*, but Tiomkin did it and was given an Academy Award for it. As moving picture scores go this is a lavish one, not infrequently over-orchestrated though one cannot deny its effectiveness as atmospheric and picturesque music. That it is not always original is not important, yet we can imagine Grofe resenting *On the Spanish Bit Trail* with its all too obvious reuse of equine rhythms. I suspect the music fitted to the action in the film proves more persuasive than it does in a concert hall suite, but its character is such that one can expect it to be widely played on the radio. This sort of score is by and large *Gebrauch* music (music written for use or custom) and does not rely on inspiration but usefulness. Each of the excerpts suggests its name; thus the opening *Rio Grande* aims to present a sumptuous musical picture, *Orizaba* is a dance for Tilly Losch, *On the Spanish Bit Trail* is equine music, etc.

Tiomkin uses several themes in the sections dealing with the lovers which are reiterated and reused. The album will undoubtedly appeal to a lot of people who see the picture and more especially those who like atmospheric music that has a story behind it. Victor has provided a lavishly illustrated album with an opening panorama of the Rio Grande country that brings back nostalgic memories of the West. Gregory Peck, Joseph Cotten, and Jenifer Jones—the three main principals in the film—are all shown in different scenes and in enlarged close ups on the cover. Mr. Tiomkin and Mr. Fiedler are each provided with a special write-up. Hollywood demands a lot of Bally-hoo and the sponsors of the records have met them more than half way. Good recording prevails throughout, and Mr. Fiedler gives the music a healthy, objective treatment.

—P.G.

Concerto

KHACHATURIAN: *Piano Concerto*; played by Moura Lympany (piano) and the London Symphony Orchestra, direction of Anatole Fistoulari. Decca Set EDA-3, four discs, price \$9.00.

▲ This work by the Armenian composer, Aram Khachaturian, has been widely played throughout the world since its premiere in Russia in 1935. The present recording was issued in November 1945 in England and hailed by the reviewers. The work is a showpiece, calculated to glorify the soloist, but the composer knows the value of a good orchestral background and he scores richly. Khachaturian has a feeling for folk tunes, and we are told his "music is deeply rooted in the folklore of his native Armenia". But there are other influences—typically Russian ones in which one finds barbaric elements and clashes of power. The opening movement has these. The composer does not develop his material sufficiently to deepen the musical interest, much of the emotion is on the surface and it is the virtuoso characteristics of the score which give it the semblance of being much ado about more than it really is. W. R. Anderson, in *The Gramophone*, remarked that though the material of the opening movement lacks de-

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velopment, there have been "few since Moussorgsky that put such force into their speech" as Khachaturian does. (Parenthetically he adds he is not attempting to compare the two composers. I like his remarks *en toto* of the first movement—it gives "a fine sense of swirling modern-Romantic derring-do. It makes me think of a youth's first reading of *Ivanhoe*: for this hearty wildness is purely Romantic...". The slow movement is not very deep—Anderson calls it "more bark than bite". The last movement goes folkish. Of this movement, friend Anderson says: "This running about does not impress me: too much pressure of mere sound, and not enough of thought." The latter statement really applies to the whole work, but the public likes a good show and the composer has put one on.

Miss Lympny handles the piano part with technical efficiency and expressive feeling. And Mr. Fistoulari backs her up with a solid, telling orchestral accompaniment. The recording here is excellently contrived, but I do not think it has the wide range of frequency of the *Petroushka* set. It might be remarked in passing that Decca's FFR sets are only available in automatic sequence.

—P.H.R.

Keyboard

BEETHOVEN: *Adagio Cantabile* (from *Sonata No. 8 in C minor, Op. 13*); played by Oscar Levant (piano). Columbia ten-inch disc 17403-D, price 75c.

▲ Since Columbia only last month issued a recording of the *Pathetique Sonata*, played by Serkin, it is difficult to see what prompted this disc. There is a British film—*The Seventh Veil*—currently making the rounds, in which this excerpt plays an important part. That may or may not have had something to do with making it available on a single disc.

While the interpretation here is definitely not the last word on the music, it offers the pianist no technical problems, and Levant obviously has made a great effort to play it exactly as written. He is careful to observe every dotted value, each staccato slur, all

the dynamic indications. Despite such sober effort, one must say that a spiritual affinity to the music is missing. No glaring lapse of taste is shown, however, the music is not important enough to make much difference one way or the other, and since Levant here is very well recorded, the disc probably will find an audience.

—H.C.S.

CHOPIN: *Black Key Etude* (Op. 10, No. 5); *Revolutionary Etude* (Op. 10, No. 12);

LECUONA: *Malaguena*; **POULENC:** *Pastourelle*; played by Oscar Levant (piano). Columbia disc 71890-D, price \$1.00.

▲ Levant has recorded all of these previously, and the selections probably have been re-recorded on one encore disc. The Chopin works are to be found in M-649; the Lecuona and Poulenc in M-560 (Oscar Levant Plays Popular Moderns). Our opinion of the interpretations have not altered much. Levant is out of his depth in the Chopin etudes, both technically and interpretively. He does better work in the two other pieces, though rhythmically one notices some erratic spots. It is difficult to see why Columbia does not record Levant in music for which he has an undoubted flair, rather than the staples of the concert repertoire.

—H.C.S.

CHOPIN: *Sonata in B flat minor, Op. 35*; played by Artur Rubinstein (piano). Victor set M- or DM-1082, three discs,

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▲ Arguments still resound over this work: is it, or is it not, a sonata? With the *B minor* there is little doubt; everyone agrees that it is, though not exactly a model of construction that would have sent Mozart into ecstasy. Schumann went so far as to accuse Chopin, in this *B flat minor Sonata*, of a jest. "The idea of calling it a sonata is a caprice. . . for he has simply bound together four of his wildest children, to smuggle them under this name into a place to which they could not have penetrated. . . The finale he has given us sounds more like a joke than a piece of music. Yet we must confess that even from this joyless, unmelodic movement, an original, a terrible mind breathes forth, the preponderance of which annihilates resistance, so that we listen, fascinated and uncomplaining, to the end, but not to praise; for, as I have said before, this is not music. The sonata commences enigmatically, and closes with an ironic smile, a sphinx."

This is a remarkable criticism, though one might take exception to the remark "this is not music." It is music; great, profound music. So are the first two movements. Today one can dispense with the *Funeral March*, though perhaps the feeling of revulsion is due to its hackneyed qualities and burlesque associations. But Chopin never equalled the compact strength of the first movement and the wild, unrestrained quality of the second: not in the later *B minor Sonata*, certainly not in the now totally forgotten *C minor Sonata* (Op. 4 and, incidentally, worthy of an occasional revival).

Programmatic implications have raised a little eddy of dust around this work's bold outline. Each of the movements has a different emotional message, and sentimental analysts have tried to run a needle of a story through them, complete to the wind over the grave that the whirling last movement is supposed to suggest. All that, of course, is ridiculous.

Not too many recordings of the complete work have been made. One can mention the early electric by Rachmaninoff, or the old Grainger and Cortot, all of which are out of the catalogues. This is Victor's only existing version; Columbia has one by Kilenyi, issued in August, 1939. The latter's is still a servicable recording, though on a

lower level with higher surface noise and nowhere comparable to this new one in bass definition. Kilenyi takes five sides, largely because he omits the one repeat and the second ending in the trio of the *Funeral March*. Rubinstein, who takes the repeats and is more generously spaced, takes six sides.

There have been times when Rubinstein—as in his version of the *Appassionata Sonata*—plays with the subtlety of a ham actor doing a Hamlet soliloquy. There also are those fortunate occasions when he plays like a Titan, and this is one of them. Chopin generally is his happiest medium, especially the Chopin of the bigger forms. There the forms are stretched over a large canvas, and since Rubinstein at his best is essentially a pianist in the grand tradition, with a healthy, athletic quality, unlimited virtuosity, and, above all, a sense of drama, the results are emotionally credible.

Here he plays with fire and passion. He approaches the borderline of exaggeration, but I think that he carries all before him without overstepping the mark. Highly dramatic, charged with tension, he hits the basses with sledge-hammer blows, sings out the melodies without sentimentalism, and develops everything to a logical, resounding climax. Comparison with the Kilenyi set is a bit unfair. The younger pianist gives a lyrical interpretation, one that is sensitive and in good taste, but one that nowhere catches the drive that Rubinstein brings to his.

Only in the last movement do the two meet anywhere nearly on equal terms. A hard nut to crack and a harder one to play, it is written in single-note prestissimo octave unison passages and marked *sotto voce e legato*. Most pianists, to relieve the muttering, cryptic flow, insert a tremendous crescendo in one upward scale passage toward the end, even though it is not marked in the music. Kilenyi follows that procedure. Rubinstein hints at it, but throughout the movement cannot seem to make up his mind whether to play *sotto voce* or let himself go. As a result he hovers uneasily between the two styles, nor does he precisely follow the *legato* part of the instructions. Nevertheless he has turned in a thrilling interpretation that is in the best tradition of romantic piano artistry. —H.C.S.

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DEBUSSY: *Pour le Piano—Prelude, Sarabande, Toccata; and Danse*; played by Gaby Casadesus (piano). Vox Set 617, two discs, price \$2.75.

▲ Mme. Casadesus runs her famous husband a close second in her performance of Debussy's music. I am happy to find her playing the composer's suite for piano written between the years of 1896 and 1901. Whether or not Debussy had the old French clavichinists in mind when he wrote this suite, one cannot be sure. Suffice it say, he poured new wine into old bottles and wrote undoubtedly the first impressionistic suite for piano. The finest of the three pieces is the *Sarabande* with its grave beauty and melodic serenity. The *Prelude* is brilliant and on first acquaintance may seem little more than an exercise, but it has its charm and its cadenza near the end is a moment of deft inspiration. The *Toccata* has been termed little more than an exercise, since it was written for one of his pupils, but I agree with Oscar Thompson who describes it as "a highly colored work, with decorative arpeggios and an adventurous exploration of sonorities". Mme. Casadesus plays these pieces with tonal fluency and rhythmic smoothness. Her style is a little more straightforward than her husband's and in my estimation well adapted to the music.

The *Danse* on the last side was originally called *Tarantelle styrienne*. It dates from 1890, not 1901, as the record label gives it. It suggests Russian influences and orchestral potentialities. This was noted by at least one writer before Ravel saw fit to supply it with an orchestral dress. I find myself preferring the Ravel transcription, which Koussevitzky included some years ago on the fourth side of his recording of Ravel's *La Valse*. Mme. Casadesus plays this work neatly and with expression, but it seems to ask for more tonal color than she obtains.

The recording is good but suggests a studio without an enlivening resonance, and the high surface sound is sometimes disturbing.

—P.H.R.

DEBUSSY: *Preludes, Book II*; played by Robert Casadesus (piano). Columbia set M- or MM-644, six ten-inch discs, price \$5.25.

▲ "Then there are the *Preludes*," writes Lockspeiser in his biography of Debussy. ". . . Often, I imagine, the composition must have been started by coming upon a phrase too good not to make into a piece, a suitable subject being found afterwards. They are like pages from an artist's sketch-book, some catching the life of some movement or form, some no more than promising and some that should have been scrapped. . . One notices that the best examples are in the first of the two books. In the second one might mention *Les Fées son d'exquises danseuses* and *General Lavine-eccentric*, a kind of musical Toulouse-Lautrec, but the others are mostly lacking in spontaneity."

Which is quite true. Confronted with amorphous specimens like *Canope* or *Bruyères* a pianist can do little but play the notes and hope that the vague musical qualities are not charged against his interpretation. Against the interpretive difficulties, moreover, Debussy did not spare the fingers of the pianist, and these pieces are very difficult to play.

Not since 1939 has a recording of these *Preludes* been issued. That one was Giesecking's, also released by Columbia, and this new set evidently is planned to supersede it. It is, undoubtedly, a better recording, though even here Casadesus has not had the best of luck with the engineers. The bass is overly favored, and a few chords rattle. Too, the scratch level is pretty high; one does not notice it in the more forceful excerpts, but in things like *Brouillards* or *La Terrasse des audiences au clair de lune* it becomes mildly distracting. A few playings will be necessary to clear the grooves.

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The interpretation of Casadesus is quite faithful, but the listener must realize that recording has its limitations and that music as delicate as this cannot be transferred to wax with entire success. Debussy has marked many pianissimos, tiny crescendos, and hidden melodic lines that one hears in the concert hall but not on records. As a matter of fact, Casadesus plays the *Preludes* much better in concert, where he can exploit his amazing dynamic finesse. This pianist has plasticity, technique, clean articulation and intelligence. His playing in this set displays all of those qualities, though the sum total is less improvisatory than Giesecking's version.

Most striking is the relative lack of pedal effects. Rapidly moving passages like the ones in *Les Fées* or *Ondine* are, if anything, too cleanly played; an occasional smudge with the pedal, I believe, would have removed the surface glitter and substituted a more impressionistic flavor. The purely virtuosic pieces, on the other hand—difficult works like *Les Tierces alternées* or *Feux d'artifice*—are magnificently played. In this album, then, we have a well-planned, well-executed performance of music that is far from being the most significant of Debussy's works.

—H.C.S.

Violin

PAGANINI: *La Campanella*; *Moses Fantasy*; *Caprice No. 13 in B flat major* and *Caprice No. 20 in D major*; *Moto Perpetuo*; *The Witches Dance*; played by Ruggiero Ricci (violin), with Louis Persinger at the piano. Vox Set 614, three discs, price

▲ Paganini was undoubtedly a greater violinist than a composer, but he wrote some music which, because it gives a player the fullest opportunities to show off his technique, has always been popular with violinists. His 24 *Caprices* are described as a lexicon of the Paganini technique. When well played they inevitably receive a rousing reception from audiences. *La Campanella*, the Rondo from the composer's *Second Violin Concerto*, is one of Paganini's most ingrati-

ating violin works; it deserves the popularity it has acquired. *Moto Perpetuo* is a study in finger dexterity, too familiar both in its present version and its orchestral transcription to require extended comment. I always find myself wondering before a player has finished it whether he derives his pleasure from the performance or the applause that follows. The *Moses Fantasy*, based on a prayer from Rossini's opera *Moses*, is a tame affair compared to the other compositions but it has an appealing melodic quality. *The Witches Dance*, despite its somewhat fabulous history and its demands on prodigious technique, remains nonetheless a rather sentimental affair. And the two *Caprices* can be likened to sugar and fireworks.

It is to the credit of Mr. Ricci that he makes this music seem more important than it really is by virtue of his brilliant technique and his smooth, singing tone. Perhaps Paganini had more magic in his performance of these works, especially *The Witches Dance*, but Ricci has a wizardry of his own and his handling of the final pages of this piece are a dazzling display of virtuosity. The young violinist has some rough spots but on the whole he surmounts most obstacles with tonal fluency and technical aplomb. Mr. Persinger, who has been the teacher of Ricci, gives him understanding and sympathetic support at the piano.

The recording is tonally clear but the balance between violin and piano is a bit in favor of the former instrument. The surfaces on the discs I heard were not too smooth.

—P.H.R.

Voice

EARLY AMERICAN CAROLS—*The Seven Joys of the Virgin*; *Matthew, Mark, Luke and John*; *I Wonder As I Wander*; *The Carol of the Birds*; *The Little Liking*; *The Carol of the Angels*; sung by John Jacob Niles, accompanying himself on the dulcimer. DISC set 732, three 10-inch discs, price \$3.00.

▲ Niles is one of the foremost exponents and collectors of folk music in this country. His

voice is a curious one, that is what voice he has. Much of his singing is falsetto. Today, his voice shows the wear of time, indeed there are evidences that his middle register is almost gone, and the manner in which he glosses over its usage is ingenious to say the least. His intermixture of several voices does not serve his diction too well—I found it necessary to refer constantly to the printed words.

Having discussed Mr. Niles' voice, it should be noted that the singer accompanies himself on dulcimers, all of which he has built himself. The title of the album is a misnomer, because the last three songs are not early American ones, but compositions by Mr. Niles in the manner of old carols. To be sure, *The Little Liking* is an adaptation of an old melody, but mainly it is the work of Niles. All of these songs have a very definite appeal. The singer says of one of his—*The Carol of the Angels*—"it is done in the manner of a 15th century carol—which after all of these years of association, has become my manner". It is this assimilation of the old style that gives Niles' own compositions the semblance of real folk origin, and his work along these lines has won him many admirers. The first two songs, which Niles got from natives of North Carolina, are among his best folk offerings. Gladys Swarthout has made a lovely recording of *I Wonder As I Wander*. Although I have never been a wholehearted admirer of Mr. Niles' singing (there is something artificial about his style), I nonetheless find his songs of unusual interest. The recording here is adequately accomplished.

—P.G.

HYMNS OF ALL THE CHURCHES: *In the Garden* (Miles); *Beneath the Cross of Jesus* (Maker); *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God* (Luther); *Crossing the Bar* (Barnby); *Holy, Holy, Holy* (Dykes); *Veni Jesu, Amor Mi* (Cherubini); *Beautiful Isle of Somewhere* (Fearis); *The Old Rugged Cross* (Bennard); *Eili, Eili* (Sandler); *Shepherd, Show Me How to Go* (Conant); sung by the "Hymns of All Churches" Choir, direction of Frederick J. Jacky; soloists: Bruce Foote (Baritone), Lillian Chookasian (contralto), William Miller (tenor), Cantor Benjamin Landsman (baritone), Louise Weber (soprano); with

organ, violin, cello and harp. Victor set P-162, four 10-inch discs, price \$3.75.

HYMNS WE LOVE: *Rejoice, Ye Pure in Heart* (Messiter); *Sun of My Soul* (Keble); *Onward, Christian Soldiers* (Sullivan); *Rock of Ages* (Hastings); *Hark, Hark, My Soul* (Smart); *Nearer, My God, to Thee* (Mason); *Ten Thousand Times Ten Thousand* (Dykes); *Abide with Me* (Monk); *Lead, Kindly Light* (Dykes); *Stand up, Stand up for Jesus* (Webb); *Fling out the Banner* (Calkin); *Now the Day is Over* (Barnby); sung by Nelson Eddy (baritone) in four-part harmony, with Theodore Paxson at the organ. Cloumbia set M-646, five 10-inch discs, price \$4.50.

▲ The plan of the first of these two sets of hymns is professedly interdenominational—so much so, in fact, that it includes the synagogue under the general heading "churches." There is a strong leaning, however, toward the less formalized Protestant sects, for three of the eight sides are given over to Gospel songs. These lighter hymns are immensely popular in general Protestant groups (from my recent army experience I know that *The Old Rugged Cross* was the hymn most used in at least one regiment) and I suppose that the selection might be justified statistically, but for the purposes of a balanced anthology the field might well have been made broader. Surely there are more denominations which could have been represented.

The "Hymns of All Churches" Choir is a radio organization sponsored by General Mills, and their performances are in the present day radio tradition. There are solo voices against humming choral backgrounds,

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generous use of the accompanying harp, violin and cello, and other such effects. The group is quite definitely a choir, not a choral society.

Columbia releases the second set apparently on the assumption that if Nelson Eddy is good (and there is a large public that says he is) then four Nelson Eddys must be four times as good. I have heard other artists sing duets with themselves by means of trick recording—and the effect has on occasion been a decidedly pleasant one—but Mr. Eddy goes his colleagues two better by taking all the parts in a male quartet. The main thing which this accomplishment seems to me to prove is that the effectiveness of a quartet depends on the individual and contrasting qualities of the four voices, and that the perfect blend is not achieved by identity of tone. Where was there ever a first-rate male quartet without a good solid bass? Matters of shading and contrast (beyond periodical solo stanzas) have not greatly bothered this singer-in-quadruplicate, nor is the recording a model of clarity. I find that the hymns sound best when the volume is reduced at least to moderate.

—P.L.M.

KREISLER: *Stars in My Eyes* (from *The King Steps Out*); KERN: *The Touch of Your Hand* (from *Roberta*); sung by Eleanor Steber (soprano) with orchestra, direction of Jay Blackton. Victor 10-inch disc 10-1248, price 75c.

▲ Miss Steber continues her series of popular and semi-popular songs, and matches the performances of recent months which have won her singing such warm praise. These two selections are well-known and typical, and the soprano gives every evidence of affection for them. The tone quality is limpid and lovely throughout, and there is a fine firmness about the placement of each tone. One might cavil at some lack of clarity in her diction, but these texts are certainly not of great importance, and they have been set in such a way that any attention they might claim has been diverted to the singer's tone. The accompanying orchestra is appropriately lush, and the recording is excellent.

—P.L.M.

MAHLER: *Wer hat dies Liedlein erdacht*;
and FRANZ: *Zwei welche Rosen*, Op. 13,

No. 1; sung by Mary Paull (soprano) with Kenneth Hieber at the piano. Vanguard Disc No. 3, 10-inch, price 75c.

▲ Vanguard supplies printed texts in German and English with this disc, an admirable procedure. The Mahler song is a delightful one; a song that relies on its rhythmic charm which fortunately the two artists here handle neatly. It is a setting from the collection of German folk verse, *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*, which Mahler favored, belongs to a group of these poems for which Mahler supplied orchestral backgrounds for his settings. Elisabeth Schumann once sang it on an H.M.V. record, but this has long been withdrawn. Miss Paull is an intelligent singer, whose musicianship commends her to the respect of the record buyer. The recording here is clear but in an effort to obtain a better than average balance the piano has been allowed a bit too much leeway on occasion. Nevertheless, I feel certain, anyone owning this disc will find Mahler's Viennese folksong so liltingly delightful that they will be drawn to playing the record again and again.

Miss Paull is to be praised for choosing a lesser known Franz lied. She does it very well indeed, but the song has none of the spontaneity of appeal of the Mahler. Moreover, its decadent text owns an artificiality, which although Franz redeems it, nevertheless may leave it less persuasive in subsequent performances. One wishes that Miss Paull had chosen two Mahler songs, but she deserves respect for digging out an unfamiliar lied by an unjustly neglected composer.

—P.H.R.

MOZART: *Don Giovanni: Madamina; II Seraglio: Ah! che boglio trionfare; The Magic Flute: Qui sdegno non s'accende; Mentre ti lascio, o figlia; Nozze di Figaro: Se vuol ballare; Nozze di Figaro: Aprete un po quegl' occhi*; sung by Ezio Pinza (basso) with Metropolitan Opera Orchestra, direction of Bruno Walter. Columbia set M- or MM-643, four discs, price \$4.85.

▲ This set finds Mr. Pinza back on his home ground after several excursions into repertoire less suited to his talents. The basso is at his best in *Don Giovanni* and *Le Nozze di Figaro*, and his best is good enough to win him a reputation as perhaps the greatest present day exponent of the title roles.

Supported by the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra under the distinguished leadership of another famous Mozartean, Bruno Walter, Mr. Pinza here gives us some impressive singing, if not the definitive recordings of the arias presented.

In his first selection the singer assumes the role of Leporello, thus challenging comparison with his Metropolitan colleague, Salvatore Baccaloni. Barring a couple of doubtful high notes his performance is good, though hardly so pat as Baccaloni's. That celebrated *buffo* artist has twice recorded the air—once beautifully in Victor's complete *Don Giovanni* and once in an over-amplified Columbia single (71084D). Other older versions of this music include the highly personalized performance of Chaliapin and the attractively solid one of Journet, both long since withdrawn.

Osmín's tirade from *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, originally *Hal wie will ich triumphieren* but here translated into *Ah! che voglio trionfare*, is far more valuable, since it has never before to my knowledge been listed in the American catalogues, and has been rather more than rare even in Europe. It also gives Mr. Pinza a fine opportunity to demonstrate his endurance, his diction and some unexpectedly full and solid low D's. Another translation is the superb *In diesen heil'gen Hallen*, or *Qui sdegno non s'accende*, one of the great solos written for the bass voice. But here I find the singing disappointing because Pinza lacks the essential poise for this music. The perfect recording has not yet been made, but among those listed in recent catalogues that of Kipnis (Victor 8684) seems to me the best, despite the fact that he too falls short of perfect rhythmic steadiness, and that his habit of clipping off his words is occasionally noticeable. Wilhelm Strienz in the complete *Zauberflöte* (Victor M-542) is too violent for the serene character of Sarastro. Stylistically and vocally the primitive Plancon disc (Victor 85077) is meltingly beautiful; he too is rather free rhythmically, yet he never bogs down, and his *legato* might profitably be studied by all the modern singers mentioned here.

Mentre ti lascio, o figlia is not from an opera, but an independent concert aria. Though it was once recorded acoustically by Rehkemper, it is virtually unknown, and

therefore provides a pleasing novelty. Hardly a masterpiece, it is typically Mozartean, and Mr. Pinza does it very well indeed. The *Se vuol ballare* included here is the basso's second recording; the first was issued by Victor in 1944, although I believe it was made some years earlier. At the time of release it was not considered a complete success, and it was promptly withdrawn. The new version is satisfactorily manipulated, but the recitative is disappointingly slow and lacking in crispness. I cannot help contrasting it with the acoustic disc of de Luca, a masterpiece of delivery. I do not remember any other single domestic record of *Aprite un po quegl' occhi*. Both here and in the *Se vuol ballare* I find myself preferring Willy Domgraf-Fassbänder, who sings Figaro in Victor's complete set; gifted with no such big and noble voice as Pinza's, he makes a distinct advantage of the lightness of his tone quality. And there is real venom in his delivery.

My overall impression of the new recordings is that the voice has been unduly favored, though this varies from disc to disc, and is never extremely bad. The orchestra on the whole seems over brilliant and lacking in bass. Incidentally, what sounds like a doctored piano is used in the *Figaro* recitatives.

—P.L.M.

RIMSKY-KORSAKOFF (arr. Miklos Rózsa): *Song of India* from *Sadko*; *Hymn to the Sun* from *Le Coq d'Or*; *Gypsy Song*; *Fandango*—from the Universal Picture *Song of Sheherazade*; sung by Charles Kullman (tenor) with orchestra, conducted by Julius Burger. Columbia set X-272, two 10-inch discs, price

▲Hollywood has made a picture on an incident in the life of the composer Rimsky-Korsakoff. As in such cases, considerable

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license is taken with the composer's music, and having hired a Metropolitan Opera tenor to render the vocal numbers in the picture, Hollywood has required him among other things to sing a coloratura soprano aria, the famous *Hymn to the Sun* from *The Golden Cock*, the results of which experiment are out of this world. Not having seen the picture, I can not say anything of how the songs are fitted into the story nor how Mr. Kullman sounds in the sound track. Here, he is far from happy in all except the *Song of India*. *Gypsy Song*, adapted from two themes in the composer's *Antar Symphony*, and *Fandango*, adapted from the *Capriccio Espagnol*, are banal songs with poor lyrics; they impose a task on the singer which is far from a successful one. Our admiration of Kullman's musically work in the past is not sustained by this album, which too strongly suggests to us an operatic artist out of his element. Whether record buyers who see and admire the picture and Mr. Kullman's work in it will find this set an acceptable memento or not is something we would not begin to predict. —P.G.

VERDI: *La Traviata*: *Ah! fors' è lui*; sung by Licia Albanese (soprano) with RCA Victor Orchestra, direction of Frieder Weissmann. Victor 11-9331, price \$1.00.

▲ All sorts and conditions of sopranos try their throats at *Ah! fors' è lui*, and a recording of the aria by Miss Albanese, one of the most distinguished of present day Violettas, was inevitable. Its release is timely, following reasonably closely after her performance of the role in Toscanini's *Traviata* broadcasts. Violetta's music offers fascinating possibilities to all comers with the requisite vocal range, for Verdi wrote into it something to show off the best qualities of every type of operatic soprano. There is strong *recitative* for the dramatic singer, a lovely vocal line for the lyric, and dazzling *cadenzas* for the coloratura. For this reason every performance we hear, though it may be strong enough in one or more of these requirements to cancel all other obligations, usually stands open to criticism in some respect. A Melba or a Tetrazzini might sing it more brilliantly than any of her rivals, yet a Muzio, a Bori or a Ponselle could invest it with a humanity lacking in the performances

of these sensational vocalists. Such a singer as Frieda Hempel in her Metropolitan days could pretty well measure up to all the requirements, as her old Victor recording remains to attest, but so far as I know there has been no one since her time who struck so nearly perfect a balance.

Among the electrical recordings my preference has long dwelt with Bori (Victor 7438 and 11-8569) who had the necessary dramatic intensity and lyric line if not the full measure of brilliance, Miss Albanese, as has been rather frequently remarked, has a good deal of Miss Bori's stylistic refinement as well as a rather similar tone quality; and of course her performance benefits by vastly superior recording. Her treatment of the *recitative* has not the snap nor the conviction of Bori's, but suggests rather a softer or more shrinking Violetta. On the other hand I like her *cadenza* better, for Bori's has always seemed rather trivial! and Albanese's caressing of the words *croce e delizia* recalls Hempel. The *Sempre libera* is a little slow and measured, yet it has a lift. If the singer does not toss off the scale passages with all the brilliance of a true coloratura, she does give them meaning. It should be added, on the debit side, that occasionally her intonation is open to some question.

The reproduction here is much more natural than in her *Traviata* duet with Jan Peerce in Victor's *Treasury of Grand Opera* (M-1074) reviewed in the November ARG; here there is plenty of spaciousness for the singer and for Dr. Weissmann's excellent orchestra. Some prospective buyers will want to compare the record with that of the equally admirable Bidu Sayao (Columbia 71451D) or Lily Pons (in Columbia M-638) but on its own merits it is a good buy. —P.L.M.

In The Popular Vein

By Enzo Archetti

All Time Favorites By Harry James: *Ciribiribin*; *Sleepy Lagoon*; *One O'Clock Jump*; *Two O'Clock Jump*; *You Made Me Love You*; *Music Makers*; *The Flight of the Bumble Bee*; *Concerto For Trumpet*; Harry James and his Orchestra. Columbia Album C-117, 4-10".

● Columbia has assembled the best recordings Harry James has made over a period of years into an album for the further delight of his fans and for the convenience of others who would like to listen to a little of the best without wading through and paying for flipovers that are not so good.

All these are thrice familiar and, admittedly, his best. One may question the musical taste or value of one or two sides but all are admirable, exciting, and good examples of one facet of today's jazz.

Take Five and Dinah; Sam Donahue and his Orchestra. Capitol 260.

● Both sides begin promisingly but disintegrate into a noisy free-for-all before they are half spun. Very blatant and very disappointing in spite of an occasional good spot on tenor by Sam, himself, and some nice piano by Robert Du Rant.

Pig Foot Pete, and Your Conscience Tells You So; Ella Mae Morse and Freddie Slack, with Rhythm Section. Capitol 278.

● Very vigorous vocals and piano with solid support. Nothing at all refined but exciting.

Stormy Weather, and You Can Depend On Me; Capitol International Jazzmen. Capitol 283

● The imposing lineup containing such upper-crust men like Benny Carter, Coleman Hawkins, Bill Coleman, Buster Bailey, King Cole, and John Kirby promises much that isn't fulfilled. There is too much prima donna work for the good of the music and the job as a whole. But in spite of this, the record is worth having for those brilliant moments which pop up on both sides.

Bumble Boogie, and Sepulveda; Alvino Rey and his Orchestra. Capitol 262.

● *Bumble* is a take-off on Rimsky-Korsakov's *Flight of the Bumble Bee* in the boogie woogie idiom and strictly a showpiece for Alvino Rey's wizardry with the guitar. It's not good boogie, jazz, or dance music but it is an amazing exhibition of guitar playing. The other side is more conventional music in the popular vein with a distinctive Alvino Rey touch.

Artistry in Boogie, and Rika Jika Jack; Stan Kenton and his Orchestra. Capitol 273.

● This is another disappointment for the same reasons given before for *Stormy Weather*. The lineup promises more than it gives but worth investigating anyway because of the juicy bits by Vido Musso, Eddie Szafranski, Chico Alvarez, Kal Winding, and Stan Kenton. The recording is very forward, almost too realistic for room comfort.

White Christmas (Berlin), and Jingle Bells; Frank Sinatra, with the Ken Lane Singers

and Chorus. Orchestra under the direction of Axel Stordahl. Columbia 37152.

● This *White Christmas* will definitely not displace Bing's classic disc but it's very good Sinatra. Both sides are a little more elaborately in keeping with the holiday season.

The Christmas Song, and When You Trim Your Christmas Tree; Les Brown and his Orchestra. Vocals by Jack Haskell and Doris Day. Columbia 37174.

● On second thought, *The Christmas Song* is not a bad rival for *White Christmas*. After hearing it a few dozen times during the holiday season just passed, by all sorts of combinations its good qualities have sunk in and I'm about ready to admit that this Christmas has produced a number which should prove a perennial. The Les Brown version is good without being outstanding but the song should survive the treatment. The other side, I'm afraid, is an annual, however pretty and timely.

Who'll Buy My Violets—(Padilla) and *I May Be Wrong But I Think You're Wonderful*; Dinah Shore, with Orchestra under the direction of Harry Bluestone and Mitchell Ayres. Columbia 37140.

I'll Never Love Again (Esperon), and *You, So It's You* (from *Holiday in Mexico*); Dinah Shore with Xavier Cugat and his Waldorf-Astoria Orchestra. Columbia 37090.

The Sharp Scarf (Chaminade), and *Rumors Are Flying*; Billy Butterfield and his Orchestra. Capitol 282.

Oh, Marie! (Du Capua), and *On My Way Out*; Julia Lee and Her Boy Friends. Capitol 340.

Years and Years Ago (Toselli), and *Sooner or Later* (from *Song of the South*); Les Brown and his Orchestra. Columbia 37153.

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● These records have been grouped because they all have one thing in common: one side of each is an adaptation or arrangement or whatever you choose to call it, of a classical or semi-classical song or salon piece. They seem to indicate a new trend in popular music. First it was symphonies, concerti, and tone poems which were raided for themes on which to build swooney love songs or dripping, sentimental ballads. Now it's songs and concert or salon pieces. *Who'll Buy My Violets* is Padilla's *La Violetera*; *I'll Never Love Again* is Esperon's *La Borrachita*; *The Sharp Scarf* is Chaminade's *Scarf Dance*; *Oh, Marie!* is Di Capua's *O Marti*; *Years and Years Ago* is Toselli's *Serenade*.

Regardless of their individual merits and demerits, what can be gained by such pilfering? Surely no one is being fooled: the originals are too well known. To me, they indicate an admission by popular music writers that their creative wells are running dry.

I'll Never Love Again is probably most successful as a modern adaptation because it is not too far removed in spirit from the original in this version by Xavier Cugat. *The Sharp Scarf* is interesting because it is, frankly, an improvisation in the true jazz sense. The value of the others depends on what you think of the "interpreter." But I still maintain that modern writers should create their own themes.

This Is the Night, and *Hush-a-bye Island*; Frank Sinatra, with Orchestra under the direction of Axel Stordahl. Columbia 37193.

Among My Souvenirs, and *September Song* (Weill) (from *Knickerbocker Holiday*); Frank Sinatra, with orchestra under the direction of Axel Stordahl. Columbia 37161.

● Typical Sinatras. Well done, and if you like Sinatra, enjoyable.

Oh, Baby! — Parts 1 and 2; Benny Goodman and his Orchestra. Columbia 55039, 12".

● This is an attempt to duplicate the now classic, two-part, *Sing, Sing, Sing* and the result is eminently successful. This disc is in every way as good as its predecessor and maybe a shade more exciting. It is true jazz at its best. The performance as a whole, that of each soloist, the swing, the recording, all are about perfect. I cannot even bring myself to criticize the longish drum solo. Bouquets to Benny and Columbia for producing another jazz classic!

Tango, and *St. Louis Blues* (Handy); Eddie Rozner White Russian State Jazz Orchestra conducted by Eddie Rozner. Compass C-12209/C-12215. Price \$1.00.

There Is A Tavern in Town, and *Olive Skin Girl*; Alexandrov Chorus and Orchestra. Compass C-12751/C-12752. Price \$1.00.

● These are claimed to be the first jazz records from U.S.S.R. and they are delightful, even if they aren't 100 per cent jazz in the American

sense of the term.

To begin with, let us set things straight: the Alexandrov Chorus is not jazz. *Olive Skin Girl* is a thoroughly enjoyable song, slightly nostalgic, no doubt in the popular idiom of the day in Russia, and roughly equivalent to the romantic songs churned out daily by Sinatra, Como, Whiting, Lee, Shore, Kelly, et al. It is excellently sung by a chorus such as only the Russians can produce, well backed by a good, small orchestra. *There Is a Tavern in Town* is the same number Rudy Vallee popularized here some years ago, sounding rather strange in Russian, but nevertheless retaining the spirit and flavor of the original. The same excellent choral group does a first rate job, effectively backed by the same small orchestra.

Tango is a good, non-Latin tango such as we often received from other European countries before the War. It sounds danceable as played by Eddie Rozner's band. But the surprise of the lot is the *St. Louis Blues*! It is a performance which would do credit to an American band. There are corny moments, a la Ted Lewis, including a devastating cymbal crash at the end, and the rhythm is a bit four-square to allow perfect freedom to the players but the whole piece moves at a good pace, punctuated with good solos, particularly on trumpet, clarinet, and piano. It would seem that Eddie Rozner and his men have listened to enough good American jazz records to have absorbed some of the true spirit. This record must be heard to be believed.

Last, but not least, all credit to Compass for the fine recording and material. They are comparable to the best from the American companies. This impressed me particularly because my experience with records from U.S.S.R. has been far from favorable up to now.

Pee Wee Russell Jazz Ensemble: Since My Best Gal Turned Me Down; *Muskogee Blues*; *Rosie*; *Take Me To the Land of Jazz*; *I'd Climb the Highest Mountain*; *Red Hot Mama*.

Personnel: Pee Wee Russell, clarinet; Cliff Jackson, piano and cornet; Bob Casey, bass; Joe Grauso, drums; Vic Dickenson, trombone. Disc Album 632, 3-10". Price \$3.15.

Jazz At the Philharmonic, Volume 4: Blues, 3 parts; *Lester Leaps In*, 3 parts. Personnel: Jack Mc Vea, tenor sax; Illinois Jacquet, tenor sax; J. J. Johnson, trombone; "Shorty" Nadine, piano; Johnny Miller, bass; Les Paul, guitar; Lee Young, drums. Under the personal supervision of Norman Granz. Disc Album 504, 3-10". Price \$3.93.

● Both these Disc albums are too important musically to be dismissed with brief comments so they are merely being listed here to bring them to your attention. They will be discussed more at length next month. In the meantime try them for yourself at your dealer—with this warning: examine your copies carefully, side for side. Technically, these sets are far from perfect.

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PAUL HENRY LANG, Editor

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